

Statement by Edward J. Markey (D-MA)
Bipartisan Task Force on Nonproliferation Briefing
November 28, 2001

Good afternoon. I'd like to thank Mr. Woolsey for coming to address the Task Force today on whether Osama bin Laden has acquired nuclear weapons. Bin Laden and his terrorist associates have been making a lot of noise lately about weapons of mass destruction, including nuclear materials.

The danger from nuclear materials is three-fold:

First, and most obvious, does bin Laden have a nuclear weapon, as he claimed in a recent Washington Post article? Even if he lacks the technology to put a warhead in a missile and launch it remotely, the weapon could be smuggled into the country and detonated in a highly populated area with catastrophic consequences.

Second, does bin Laden have nuclear materials that could be used in a conventional explosive to make a "dirty bomb"? An associate of bin Laden's testified that he was personally involved in an attempt to obtain uranium for bin Laden. While the consequences of a dirty bomb are somewhat less than for a nuclear explosion, such a weapon would still cause significant loss of life and long-lasting environmental contamination.

Third, we must consider the effect of having one of our own civilian nuclear reactors turned into a weapon against us, as our jetliners were on September 11th. Associates of bin Laden have openly commented that nuclear power plants would have made better targets for those jetliners than the World Trade Center. A fully loaded 757 making impact at high speed may be able to breach the reactor containment dome and send the reactor into a core meltdown. This would rival or surpass the Chernobyl accident in the number of casualties and environmental contamination.

So, what can the United States and its allies do to minimize this threat from al Qaeda or some other subnational group? Here to educate us on this subject is our speaker for today, James Woolsey.

Jim Woolsey is currently a partner at the law firm of Shea & Gardner in Washington, D.C., a trustee of the Center for Strategic and International Studies and chairman of the advisory committee of the Clean Fuels Foundation.

Jim served as Director of the Central Intelligence Agency for two years during the Clinton administration.

He has also served on the National Commission on Terrorism, the Commission to Assess the Ballistic Missile Threat to the U.S. (Rumsfeld Commission), the President's Blue Ribbon Commission on Defense Management (Packard Commission), and the President's Commission on Strategic Forces (Scowcroft Commission). Thank you for joining us today.

###